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Utica Public Library

1893-1908

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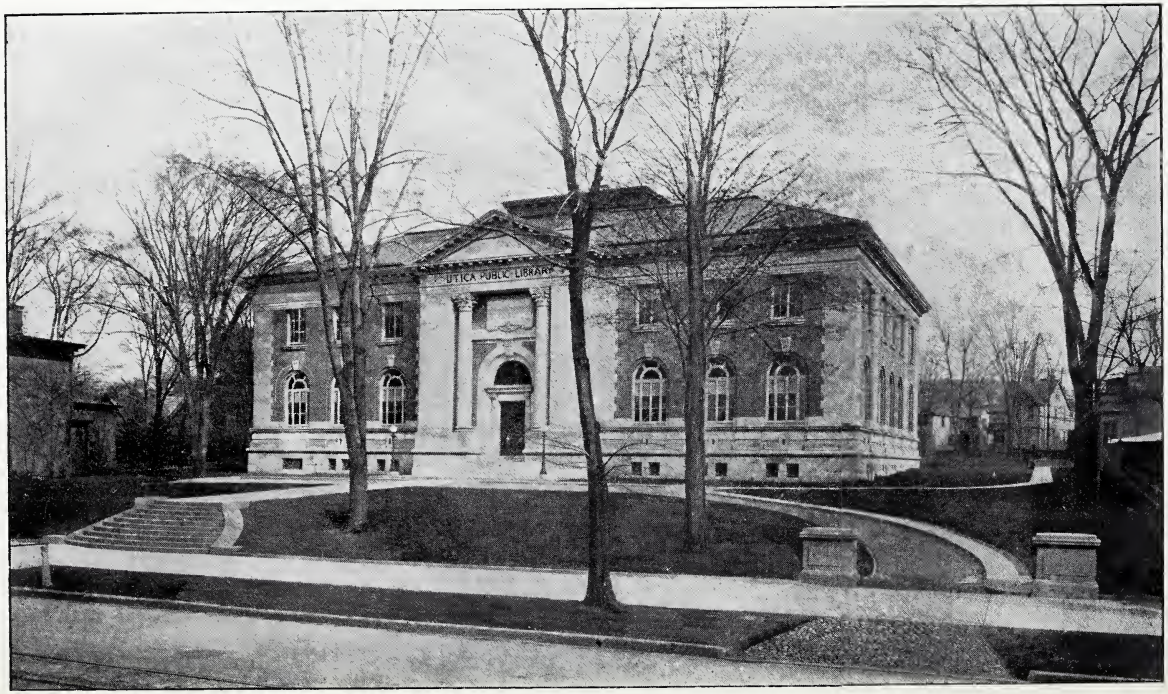
UTICA PUBLIC LIBRARY

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LIBRARIAN

Caroline M. Underhill

WITH the close of 1908 this library completed fifteen years of work—years which have been those of constant progress marked by vital changes. It seems therefore fitting at this time to show some of its growth and to summarize briefly what has been the purpose of the library from its inception fifteen years ago.

The ideal of this library has been to bring to every person in Utica whatever information he may wish, whenever he may wish it and to place within his reach the pleasure which alone comes from the reading of a good book.

The first authentic mention of the existence of a public library for Utica is in 1825. From time to time name, location, administration and character changed until finally the Utica City Library, under the management of the School Board, supplied the city's demands from 1842 until 1893. At that time for various reasons a reorganiaztion seemed necessary. To meet this need a new corporation was formed and a charter from the Regents of the University of the State of New York was granted to the Utica Public Library, June 21, 1893.

The library has been supported by annual appropriation made by the Common Council from the city's funds, increased from time to time as the demands upon the library's resources grew.

It has always been the desire of the Board of Trustees to answer as generously as possible the demands made upon the library. One by one new features of the work have been developed, until to-day the library holds a meritedly high position among those of the state.

Figures are oftentimes inadequate, but a few may aid in telling the library's story.

At the time of reorganization in 1893 about 10,000 volumes were on the shelves; in fifteen years the total number has become 52,328. The circulation has increased during the same period from about 55,122 to 172,148 for the year just closed. The number of readers

within the building has also increased year by year, though it is impossible to give exact figures of this increase and no count is kept of the hundreds of children who come day by day to make use of the reference books and current magazines provided for their use.

The yearly appropriations have been increased gradually from $7,500 in 1893 to $20,000 for the current year, the fifth in our present building.

Work with the school children was introduced in 1896 and developed rapidly until over 6,000 children now make constant use of the rooms devoted to them, taking home 55,000 books in 1908.

The reference work was encouraged and has grown from 3,627 readers in 1895 to 44,621 in 1908. Current magazines are supplied for reading, for reference work and for circulation. The library is open on Sunday afternoons from November to May from two until six o'clock for the use of those who care for a quiet reading place on that day.

Since the reorganization it has been the policy of the library to grant free access to the books in all departments. It is a privilege most fully appreciated by the readers and facilitates economy and ease of administration on the part of the library. Readers like to browse among the shelves and the possibility of making new book friends and discovering forgotten ones, lends an element of pleasure for which a public library should stand.

Year by year as the work increased and demands of study clubs and students became more numerous the limitations of the old building became apparent. Lack of ventilation, inadequate light, no room for children, too little space for those who came to read, with no administrative facilities, together with a crowded condition of the shelves, detracted from the good work possible, although in spite of these obstacles, the work developed rapidly. The need of a new building became very evident to those familiar with the library and its possibilities. In April, 1899, $1,000 was sent to the Board of Trustees with a letter of commendation for the work being done asking that the sum be made the nucleus

of a new building fund. In May of the same year the site upon which the present building stands was purchased and deeded to the Trustees of the library. There were many expressions of appreciation of this generous gift and at the election in November, 1900, the citizens of Utica emphasized this appreciation by voting to bond the city for $165,000 to erect a suitable building for the permanent home of their public library. Later the city raised bonds for an additional $55,000 for the completion of this building. The additional appropriation was made necessary by the unexpected advance in wages and materials. Meanwhile, the Trustees were making plans of procedure, at their own expense visiting other libraries and studying the problem before them in all details. Professor William R. Ware of Columbia University was selected as consulting architect, and to him much credit is due.

In April, 1901, regulations for competing architects were issued. The following July the plans of Mr. Arthur C. Jackson, associated with Carrere & Hastings of New York City, were accepted. From that date much time and thought were expended in perfecting plans for the building, letting contracts and other preliminary work, until ground was broken August 14, 1902. On May 4, 1903, with simple ceremonies the corner stone of the new building was laid. The work progressed slowly but steadily and early in December, 1904, the transfer of the books from the old building was begun. For several days this work went on with little inconvenience to the users of the library, the files of magazines, newspapers, public documents and reference books being taken out gradually. On Saturday, December 8, 1904. the last book was charged at the old building, which had served so well as the home for the library for almost thirty years. For the four following days only was the library closed to the public,—in that time the 25,000 volumes were packed, transferred and put in place on the shelves; the card catalogues, charging systems and all administrative facilities installed. furniture placed and pictures hung, ready for the opening. At three o'clock on December twelfth the doors were unlocked

and soon the rooms were filled with the friends of the library. The Building Committee handed over the key to the Board of Trustees, while Mayor Talcott reviewed briefly the work of the library, making appreciative mention of those whose careful thought had placed it in the creditable position it occupied. Thousands of Uticans came to see the library they had builded for themselves and many were the words of admiration and satisfaction. The use made of the building and all it affords as the years go on will determine its real need and appreciation by the people.

It is ever impossible to follow the development of the work of this library in any of its details without having constantly in mind the untiring devotion of Mr. John E. Brandegee, for twelve years its most active trustee and Chairman of its Library Committee. To Mr. Brandegee's conception of the high ideal of library work, to his knowledge of the details of the profession and his appreciation of good business methods combined with the standards of the student, Utica to-day owes her library as it is. By him no opportunity of a word for the library was lost, no suggestion of usefulness ignored. With the completion of the new building came to him even greater appreciation of the true worth of these things. In the death of Mr. Brandegee the library sustained its greatest loss, how great only those closely associated with him can know.

In planning for the work in the new building allowance was made for a normal growth and the rooms were arranged so that departmental lines naturally have been developed.

It is hoped that all Uticans will make serious use of the material available. Students should use it; the professional man should find something to aid him as well as the practical man. Let each citizen come with an expression of his want, and so test the worth of our library that it may be made strong where it is weak, and becoming well balanced, may thus fulfil the true function of a public library by "bringing to each individual the book that belongs to him".

REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

This department, perhaps more than any other, performs the work most truly belonging to a library. Its purpose is to furnish to everyone information desired on any topic. Its activities may be separated into two divisions, those with the general public and those with clubs, teachers and classes. Many questions of a wide range come from the general reader, from the query as to who is the author of a certain poem, to the best way to care for a circular saw, and much time and careful research is often required in finding this desired information. Several hundred volumes have been arranged by subject on shelves in the reference room where they may be consulted by all. During the last four years a number of valuable books have been added to the collection, among which we may mention the Encyclopaedia Biblica and the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the Grand Dictionnaire Universel by Larousse and the Konversations Lexikon by Brockhaus. Many sets of bound magazines have been completed and shelved in the room, making with their indexes a most helpful addition for the work of this department. Among the best magazines covering music, art, drama, literature, stories, etc., one hundred and eighty-seven are available. A special table is given to the collection of trade magazines, where technical, industrial, and practical subjects are represented by their journals. The use of these increases from month to month and this feature of the work should grow into something of real service to the men of Utica—something of service in the way of dollars and cents. When a man finds the article he wants and adds to his thanks the information "that article has saved me forty dollars", then do we indeed know that the work of the department is worth while. A small but growing collection of genealogical books is also shelved in the reference room. Many of these volumes are the gift of Mr. Seymour Morris and have added to the value of the collection very greatly. An important aid to this phase of the reference work is the collection of town and county histories found in the general library. Another very valuable adjunct in the work of the reference room is the collection of public

documents, both national and state. The Utica Public Library has for many years been a "depository library", receiving from the United States government practically a complete file of its publications. All these, with the books for general circulation, make a well-rounded selection of books for consultation on many topics. The diversity of requests for information has gained steadily in the last four years, coming frequently by telephone and mail as well as by direct question, indicating that the library is taking its rightful place in the community. A bulletin board marks the events of birth and death of famous persons by pictures and portraits; lists of the works of authors are posted and also the books on special holidays are placed on the reference desk for the more convenient use of readers.

Many of the clubs of the city send their programs to have material looked up for each topic. Not only in the number of topics looked up but in other ways the evidence is strong that the library is becoming more and more a centre of usefulness to which club workers turn.

Teachers are using the reference room more than four years ago and there is now scarcely a week during the school year when books are not reserved on special shelves for the use of teachers and their classes. Students also come more and more for material on debates, essays, etc.

The increased attendance shows somewhat the value of the reference department, but most of all, the words of appreciation frequently expressed by patrons using the room indicate that the money and thought expended in adding to its resources are well merited and bring results often incalculable.

LOAN DEPARTMENT

The work in this department represents the library's greatest activity and has shown a normal and steady growth. Where previously one assistant could give sufficient service, now six are needed and often during the busy season extra assistants have to be summoned. In 1904 there were circulated for home use 135,802 volumes while in 1908 the number has increased to

172,148 volumes. The department endeavors not merely to bring a good book to every reader, but the best book in the best way. As the number of readers has been increasing even greater vigilance has been exercised in the selection of books. An effort has been made to meet the demand for fiction by large duplication of the best more recent novels. On shelves in the delivery hall are works of varied interest, which are changed frequently so that an attractive book may always be found, even though they may not be the volumes just from the press.

The restrictions in the number of volumes which may be taken on a card have been withdrawn by degrees, until now any reasonable number may be taken out at one time. This privilege is granted freely to all just so far as the number of books on the desired subject will warrant. During the summer months "vacation privileges" are extended, whereby several books may be drawn on one card and retained through the summer without renewal. Additional privileges have also been extended to teachers so that they now have the use of a special card besides their own personal card. On this teacher's card several books may be drawn at one time for professional use only.

Near the loan desk a current events bulletin stands and on this a pictorial record of the world's events is chronicled, and on a shelf near it are placed books on the various subjects pictured.

The use of tables in the rear of the stacks has increased so greatly that during the busy hours one assistant is always there ready to answer questions and to help find books for any one who may be in doubt as to what he wishes. In addition to the regular book stack, book cases have been placed near the tables on which are found books of particular interest at the moment. Books recommended by the teachers of English at the Academy are kept in one of these cases, in others are books attractive to boys and girls.

Annotated lists of books on practical subjects and books for home reading have been printed, while a selected list of historical fiction has just been issued. On the second floor also, there are tables for the use of readers.

Sometime before the holidays has been held an exhibit of books suitable for Christmas gifts for adults as well as for younger readers. This collection contains many of the best standard books in inexpensive as well as in the best editions, and also many of the season's new books. Lists which might be helpful are placed on the shelves. The exhibits have been suggestive to many and interest in them has grown each year.

INDUSTRIAL LIBRARY

Soon after the occupancy of the present building it became evident to those interested that the need of practical and technical books was far greater than the funds available could supply. The realization of this fact resulted in the formation by a number of citizens of the Industrial Library League for the express purpose of collecting a fund for the extension of this work. In 1906 a check for $880.17 was sent by the League to the Trustees with the request that the money be expended for books on industrial subjects, preferably those represented by local industries. Among the members of the League were representatives of many of the manufacturing interests of the city. Later, additional checks for $250.00 were donated for the same purpose, making possible a library of three hundred and seven volumes, in addition to those provided from the regular funds. This library is on the second stack, conveniently arranged, with well-lighted tables for study. Almost every evening finds workers engaged in solving some practical question. Perhaps the most important books are those published by the International Correspondence School at Scranton, and the American School of Correspondence at Chicago. Of these there are full sets, primarily for use at the library, but sometimes allowed to circulate for special work. Besides the books there are many trade journals received regularly as issued. These are to be found on the centre table in the reference room.

CATALOGUE DEPARTMENT

As the value of a book is increased by a good index,

so the use of a library is far greater if its index, the card catalogue, is a good one. This library has from the first realized the need of such a catalogue. Shortly after the reorganization of the library a friend much interested gave anonymously $5,000 to be expended on the making of a catalogue. With this foundation the catalogue has been developed carefully and has become one in which the library takes pride and which proves its usefulness each day. The increase in gifts of books and in purchases has increased the work of keeping the catalogue up to date until there are now three assistants who give most of their time to it.

CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT

Children became constant patrons of the library as soon as the rules allowed them, the use of juvenile books since 1894 being from 31-47 per cent of the entire circulation. Beyond placing their books on separate shelves, however, comparatively little could be done for them until the new building gave ample quarters to a children's department. Here, first, the work was organized, three sunny rooms on the south side of the main floor given to the children, and a trained librarian for children placed in charge. The low shelves to which they have free access are filled with books suited to their use; a selection of reference books helps to answer their frequent demands for information, and a convenient door into the main book-stack makes available the entire resources of the library, whenever necessary, to supplement the work of the department.

The range of this department extends from the littlest child who can walk to the library and be happy with a picture-book while his sister is choosing "a thin book with big letters", to the boy who wants the history of the Constitution of the United States. It requires a ready knowledge of both children and books, together with a quick judgment and unlimited sympathy, to give each child who comes the right book. And the right book to the right child at the right time opens to him not only the road to unlimited knowledge, but what may be of

far more worth to him, the road to unlimited delight in good reading. This is the object and end of any library work with children.

With children the question of good and bad reading may be largely controlled by the selection of books placed on the shelves. While it is true that in a public library provision must be made for all grades of mental capacities and interests, the best can be chosen for each class without including any harmful or merely useless books. A taste for good and vigorous reading may thus be developed naturally and unconsciously and the child strengthened for an appreciation of the best books. For this reason the first thought of the department is given to a careful selection of its books.

The aim has been to supply so many of the best books that children may read them when they want to without waiting too long for "a turn"; but more and more to restrict the number of titles to the books that are really worth their reading. Children have so few years in which to read purely juvenile books, and the range of books, if not too inclusive, is so good that there is not the occasion with them, as with grown people, to demand the "latest books". Naturally the problem of suggesting books to one who has been reading but three years is different from that of supplying books to one who has been reading many years.

Attractive illustrated book-lists and bulletins on authors or subjects of interest are posted from time to time to suggest various lines of reading. Fairy tales and easy books for little children are on special shelves, and all the shelves are labelled plainly with name of author or subject. Assistants are ready at all times to help individual children select books.

In addition to the linen picture-books on the tables in the little children's corner is a shelf of fine picture-books to use which the children must show clean hands. This is but one of the steps in the process of inculcating a proper respect for books. A device which has helped somewhat with the little children has been the use of a star. As long as his card is clean each child may have a star stamped on his card for every five books drawn.

This gives older children the privilege of drawing two books on a card. The star alone is sufficient reward to call forth effort from the little children.

Since 1905 a weekly story-hour of fairy tales for little children has been held on Saturday mornings from October to May. The stories are told in a room adjoining the children's room and the attendance averages from thirty to fifty.

Stories for older children have been occasional only and of another character. A series of King Arthur stories was told one year, twice some one who knew Lincoln gave some personal reminiscences of him to the boys; twice a friend who had been to Japan told the girls about her trip; once it was a study of Webster for a class of boys in American history; once a reading of heroic poetry for boys; once a reading from Wordsworth for girls. On the night of Lincoln's Centennary, the story of the sinking of the Albemarle in the Civil War was told by one who had heard it personally from Lieut. Cushing, prefacing the story with an account of the one occasion on which he himself saw Lincoln. The audience of ninety boys was limited only by the capacity of the room.

The attendance at these stories, sometimes in the afternoon and sometimes in the evening, has ranged from forty to ninety.

The use of the room on the part of older boys and girls in the evening, is worthy of notice. School children are not allowed to draw books after six o'clock, nor are children expected to come in the evening unless with adults. Boys and girls who are working after school and Saturdays have their cards marked to show permission for evening use of the room. This includes all who have left school and gone to work too early for transfer to the main department. A check-list of these special permits shows an interesting variety of "occupations". From fifty to seventy-five, sometimes over a hundred, come every evening. Many who come in this way rarely take books home, but prefer to read in the library, depending for their choice on the books which happen to be on the shelves when they come in. So many times just the book

one wanted to put into the hands of such a reader was out, or a boy would say, "I was reading a book over there last night and cannot find it now", that a reference collection of some forty popular books for boys and girls of this age was made two years ago and placed on a special shelf for use in the children's room. The list includes such titles as "Half-back", "Blazed trail", "Sherlock Holmes", as well as an occasional one of the character of the "Perfect tribute", "Good hunting". It ensures consecutive reading from evening to evening of a story in which a child may become interested. It also induces a habit of consecutive reading on the part of children who have not before known what it was.

The teacher's class room, opening into the children's room and having a separate entrance from the main corridor, has had various uses. A reference collection of the books recommended in the State Syllabus for elementary schools was placed there three years ago and is used constantly. Teachers have come with classes for the use of books or illustrative material placed there for them, for exhibits, or simply to make the library known to their pupils. On such occasions as the last the children's librarian has given a brief talk on the use of the library.

The department has a file of over 5,000 mounted pictures which are circulated for school and club use. The foundation of the file was a set of Perry pictures, but their number has been multiplied several times by the addition of pictures clipped from magazines, circulars, and other material. The largest use of the pictures has been by the schools and the file is specially strong in travel and history. The circulation has increased from 200 the first year to 4,400 the past year.

In October, 1906, the library published, jointly with the Public Schools, a third edition of a graded and annotated list of Books for Home Reading. Single grade leaves from this list are supplied the children by the schools. Copies are also available for use in the room, for parents or for any interested in children's reading.

LOCAL HISTORY

For some time the library has been collecting and preserving maps, pictures, surveys, manuscripts, books and pamphlets published in Utica, or about Utica, or written by Uticans, in fact all printed or written material of local interest. The collection has already grown so that a room on the second floor has been set apart for it. Some of the early maps have been hung in this room. A collection of Utica imprints has been begun and over one hundred volumes and as many pamphlets have been gathered. Perhaps the most valuable is a complete set of Utica directories, the first published in 1817. Among the earliest publications is Webster's American selections in reading and speaking, printed in 1808 by Seward & Williams.

Books of local interest grow in value with time and very materially increase the usefulness of the library. The Trustees will greatly appreciate any assistance in this work—for it is one which needs the co-operation of those who have old garret accumulations at their disposal. Such things seldom appear at auction or in the second-hand catalogues, and more can be acquired through the generosity of the public than in any other way.

EXHIBITIONS

An art gallery on the second floor has made possible the holding of free exhibitions of pictures. Many have thus been enabled to see originals of Corot, Dupre, Diaz, Ridgeway Knight, Millet, H. D. Murphy, Pennell, Whistler, as well as many other modern artists. Since 1904 there have been held thirteen exhibitions with a total attendance of 28,460 persons. Many expressions of pleasure have come from those who have seen the exhibitions.

GIFTS

Besides many gifts of magazines, books and pictures from generous friends, all of which add constantly to the

working strength of the library, there have been others deserving notice.

At the opening of the new building, Mr. Thomas R. Proctor, Esq., sent a complete and valuable set of autograph letters of the Presidents of the United States. These are handsomely mounted, together with a steel engraving and brief sketch of each President, in a substantial oak standard. The collection, one of the best in existence, is one of the library's most important possessions and a source of constant interest to our visitors. This continued interest is an expression to Mr. Proctor of appreciation for his valuable gift.

In 1905 the late Mrs. Robert S. Williams presented to the library some rare and valuable manuscripts. To lovers of books it is a pleasure to have opportunity to see and know such fine examples of early bookmaking, and the possession of such treasures at once gives honor and worth to the library.

First to be mentioned, because it is the oldest, is a copy of the four gospels written in 1223 in ancient Armenian. It is a small 16mo and was written with a pen on vellum in a very neat and regular hand. The covers are leather over wood. In spite of its great age, it is in a remarkably good state of preservation.

The second manuscript is what is known among book-lovers as the "Williams Manuscript", or the Syriac Antilegomena. This was obtained in 1870 by the late Rev. William Frederic Williams, then a missionary at Mardin, by whom it was sent to his brother, the late Robert S. Williams. It contains (1) tables to find Easter and other movable feasts, (2) tables of ecclesiastical lessons, (3) the Acts and Catholic epistles, (4) the Pauline epistles, ending with Hebrews, and (5) a poem of 128 lines. The date of the completion of the manuscript is given in the colophon as July 4, 1471. Careful examination of the manuscript was made by Dr. Isaac H. Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of New York City, who pronounced it genuine.

A bronze tablet made by the Gorham Company for the Lincoln Centennary is a much-valued gift recently presented to the library. On this tablet is a bas-relief

of Lincoln by Brenner and a copy of Lincoln's famous Gettysburg speech.

STAFF

With the development of the use of the library the work required of the assistants became greater. Gradually it was found necessary, therefore, to increase the number on the staff. In 1893 there were four assistants and the librarian, while in 1908 there were twenty-two assistants.

STATISTICS

	1894	1895	1900	1905	1908
Vols. in library	12,509	17,936	29,788	40,096	52,328
Vols. added by purchase		2,831	1,805	2,297	3,822
Vols. added by gift		684	1,423	1,221	1,054
Vols. circulated	55,122	82,421	140,050	135,802	172,148
Largest daily use		571	1,146	1,080	1,337
Smallest " "		32	82	118	217
Average " "	180	267	453	446	556
Registrations—new		3,142	1,827	1,827	1,414
Registrations—renewals			1,057	1,689	1,601
Number of individuals registered since 1893		4,722	16,898	26,978	31,626
Readers in library		3,627	41,712	27,414	44,621
City appropriation	7,500	8,500	8,500	18,000	20,000

CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT

Vols. circulated				48,946	55,337
Largest daily use				392	519
Smallest daily use				51	64
Registrations—new				1,188	1,244
Registrations—renewals				350	360
Number of new children registered since 1904				1,188	4,456

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